

Wednesday, January 7, 2004

## EDITORIAL

### Government firewalls failed to safeguard nation's cattle

In what was probably a footnote in the daily news April 4, 2001, representatives from the Food and Drug Administration, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the beef industry and consumer advocates convened to testify before the tongue-tiring Senate Commerce Subcommittee on Consumer Affairs, Foreign Commerce and Tourism.

The month before, the USDA seized a flock of sheep in Vermont after several had been diagnosed with scrapie, a disease similar to bovine spongiform encephalopathy — mad cow disease.

In the 16 years before, since the symptoms of "Cow 133" (head tremors, loss of coordination and weight loss) were identified, the disease proved to be a constant bane to Britain, prompting other countries to ban beef imports from the nation. In May of 1995, 19-year-old Stephen Churchill died from new variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease, the human form of BSE. (Both diseases are part of a group of so-called transmissible spongiform encephalopathies, diseases that attack the brain, which also include deer and elk-afflicting chronic wasting diseases and kuru, a disease found in cannibals in Papua New Guinea.) Lawmakers were surely interested, then, in knowing whether American safeguards were enough to keep mad cow disease — which peaked at 100,000 confirmed infections in Britain — from crossing American borders.

Caroline Smith DeWaal, director of the food safety program for the Center of Science in the Public Interest, was justifiably concerned.

"The U.S. has had firewalls in place to protect the cattle population for getting infected with mad cow disease," Smith DeWaal told CNN, "and there are some gaps in these firewalls."

But those gaps were large ones: A General Accounting Office report issued in 2000 revealed that one-fifth of feed processing plants weren't even aware of U.S. regulations designed to prevent American cattle from contracting BSE. But, government officials seem to have faulted.

Regardless, those firewalls failed last year, as Americans learned Dec. 23 that mad cow disease had been found in Washington state, and the nearly hysterical response to the single incidence of the disease here is already damaging. Several nations, including Japan, South Korea and Taiwan have banned imports of American beef. And the domestic beef industry is already making groaning adjustments not to become, well, dead meat. Fremont Beef in Fremont, Neb., laid off 49 of its 131 workers in response to the bans — most of the processor's sales came from exports to Japan.

Caution is prudent, but given that there's a very small chance contaminated material actually made it to the dinner plate, avoiding beef now if you didn't before is probably unduly paranoid and only compounds the nation's meat woes.

Still, the dark cloud of mad cow has a silver lining: The brouhaha is already prompting government agencies to install more effective safeguards and testing procedures.

## EDITORIAL POLICY

This editorial represents the opinion of the Emerald editorial board. Responses can be sent to letters@dailyemerald.com. Letters to the editor and guest commentaries are encouraged. Letters are limited to 250 words and guest commentaries to 550 words. Authors are limited to one submission per calendar month. Submission must include phone number and address for verification. The Emerald reserves the right to edit for space, grammar and style.

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Steve Baggs Illustration

## Trashing Paradise

I went to Mexico during the winter break — flew down for 10 days of sun and fun on the Pacific Coast.

I stayed with my dad just outside a small town where all the locals smiled, waved and didn't try to sell me anything. I spent my mornings surfing consistent rights and my afternoons reading the books that I never finished during fall term. I didn't put shoes on once.

I ate fresh avocados and papayas as Lola, the bilingual parrot, sang love songs in the background. The air was 88 degrees and the water, 80.

It was beautiful — except for all the garbage.

In the state of Guerrero, where my dad lives, most of the people can't afford or don't have access to garbage collection services. As a result, they take most of their trash outside and burn it in small piles about once a week. It's a practical and cheap way to get rid of waste.

Between burning, the piles are picked over by roaming animals, scattered by the wind and spread throughout the neighborhood. The edges of the yards, which have been tenderly and carefully raked, are splattered with bits of half-melted plastic and rubber.

Plastic bottles show up on the beach,

not because they are washed up by the warm Pacific tide, but because they are blown off the top of trash piles into rivers headed for the sea. Styrofoam, buffeted upward by steady offshore breezes, perches in the coconuts, indistinguishable from the local birds.

As much as I hate the burning of the trash, I can't help but think that if I were



**Aimee Rudin**  
Five feet of fury

in the local Mexicans' shoes and forced to choose between paying a garbage collector to take the trash away — where it will probably also be burned — and buying food for my household, I would do exactly as they do and burn the garbage. It wouldn't even be a choice.

Even though I know how horrible burning petroleum-based products —

like plastic — are for the environment, I would think about survival first and air quality second, or third. And this can't be right.

I came back from Mexico just before midnight on Dec. 25. I traded in my sandals for shoes and my surf trunks for fleece-lined pants. As I walked through PDX toward the car, I noticed all the sanitary little dust bins, brooms, cleaning products and garbage cans.

Two days after getting home, my dad sent an e-mail with a picture he had taken of his truck parked on the beach surrounded by dark green fifty-gallon trash bags. He stood holding one of the bags smiling into the camera.

In his e-mail he wrote, "Dear Aimee, I spent the day cleaning up the beach in front of the house. A bunch of the local kids stopped and helped me. It was awesome. I filled eight Hefty bags and could have filled eight more. Love, Dad."

I fired back a short note. "Dad, That's great, but now what do you do with the filled garbage bags? Love, Aimee."

Contact the columnist at [aimeerudin@dailyemerald.com](mailto:aimeerudin@dailyemerald.com). Her opinions do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald.

## Columnist has wrong idea about PETA

I am outraged at the obtuse opinions expressed in the recent article "Preposterous PETA" (ODE, Nov. 14).

First of all, PETA does not spend the majority of its budget on animal shelters because it focuses on the four areas in which the largest numbers of animals suffer the

## GUEST COMMENTARY

most intensely and for the longest periods of time: factory farms, labs, in the fur trade, and in the entertainment industry. PETA's mission, contrary to Willse's idea of "the group's largely fanatical philosophy" is to protect animals from exploitation and cruelty and bring about positive changes in the ways humans regard other species.

Secondly, if PETA has to use images of the holocaust and known cancer sufferer Mayor Giuliani to get its message to people, so be it! PETA's campaign "Holocaust on your plate" can hardly be called "an appalling affront to every Jew" because it is based on the writings of revered Jewish writer-philosopher Isaac Bashevis Singer, who said "In re-

gulation to animals, all people are Nazis; for [them] it is an eternal Treblinka." The comparison of animal exploitation to the holocaust is consistent with the longstanding Jewish tradition of promoting kindness to animals (Lewis Regenstein, Jewish columnist-author).

According to Willse, "animal testing is essential" and "PETA seems to lack the appreciation for human life or decency"? Human clinical studies and computer simulations are faster, more reliable, less expensive and more humane than animal tests. Animal models differ from their human counterparts, conclusions drawn from animal research are likely to delay progress, mislead, and do harm to the patient (M.A. Fadali, Cardiovascular and Thoracic Surgeon). In the last two decades many drugs (among them Thalidomide, Opren, phenacetin, Eferol, Oraflex, Suprol and Selacryn) were taken off the market after causing hundreds of deaths and/or injuries to humans, but were initially approved by the FDA after testing on animals showed favorable results. Many animal experiments give misleading results and with regard to human health, we'd probably be

better off if we hadn't relied on them.

Animal tests are primitive compared to modern technology. For example, instead of dripping chemicals into animals' eyes to test toxicity, researchers can now grow a layer of cells on a membrane and monitor changes in electrical resistance to test chemicals. Many advances in our society came from others' exploitation — for examples, roads were built by slaves, yet we still drive on them. We can't change the past. We can't stop all suffering; that doesn't mean we shouldn't stop any.

Willse also believes "the use of animals for food" is acceptable as long as that use "is reasonable." Reasonable? We feed so much grain to animals (raised for food) that if we all became vegetarians, we would save a quantity of food equal to the caloric needs of 8.7 billion people more than the entire human population.

Our world today allows for kinder, gentler ways to feed, clothe, entertain and educate ourselves other than by killing animals.

Jennifer Facciuto is an undeclared senior and PETA member.